DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF SOUL IN PRE-SOCRATIC THOUGHT: A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY

Synopsis

Submitted By

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2014

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Introduction:

The phrase "pre-Socratic philosophy" refers to the philosophy of those thinkers who were born before Socratics. The present study attempts to focus on those thinkers who discussed about soul. Generally the terms "soul" stands for the Greek word "psyche" or "nous". In later western philosophy the term "soul" and "mind" are sometimes used interchangeably but pre-Socratics philosophers have treated mind as a distinct part of soul. As is evident from the following two quotes:

(a) "The scope of philosophy is to free the mind, the divine part of the soul which is planted in us, and to set it at liberty, without which no one can learn or benefit of the senses."[1]

(b) "… Nous, Logos pure reason) the intellectual part of the human soul."[2]

Aims and scope of the study:

The aim of the present study is twofold:-

(a) To present a critical analysis of philosophical religious and ethical aspect of the pre-Socratic concept of soul.
(b) To examine the impact of said concept on the philosophical issues related to mind-body dualism and life and death etc.

The present study also tries to search the answer of the following central questions-

(i) What did the pre-Socratic philosophers understand by "nous" or "psyche"?

(ii) Why did they admit it?

(iii) Did the pre- Socratic thinkers borrow the notion of soul from any other resources?

(iv) Can we characterize the pre-Socratic concept of soul as a purely philosophical or as a purely religious one?

(vi) Can we find the germ of mind-body dualism in the pre-Socratic thought?

(vii) What, according to them, is the final destination of the soul?

Methodology:

The methodology that will be adopted in this study is as follows:-

(a) A critical study of the views of the available primary and secondary resources. In respect of the aims and objectives of the study the researcher treats the fragments of the pre-Socratic

[1] Saktllariou, George,(Ed.) , *Proceedings of The Congress.,* Publishing house of French Institute, Athens,1957, P. 82.
[2] Ibid, P. 36.

philosophers' as primary sources. The doxographical writings and biography will also be treated as primary sources. The research articles and philosophical works on the pre-Socratic philosophers by old and contemporary scholars are treated as secondary sources.

(b) To develop hypothesis on the basis of available primary and secondary resources.

Limitation: It is known to us that the pre-Socratic philosophers did not leave behind rich literature for us. Some of them did not leave any writings at all. Some have left little bit in their own such language. We get to know about them and their works from the interpretation of later philosophers such as Aristotle. These writings were also in Greek language. But now some scholars such as Gregory Vlastos have raised questions about the authenticity of such writings. Even, now Aristotle's commentaries also face the difficulties. Later, the fragments of the pre-Socratic philosophers and the writings of their successors have been translated in various languages such as English. This study is based on the translated works of the well known scholars of the Greek philosophy. The translated literature also faces the same difficulties.

Chapterization :

The dissertation will be divided into the following chapters:-

1. General introduction.
2. Milesian concept of soul.

(a) Monistic concept of soul.

(b) Pluralistic concept of soul.

3. Pythagorean concept of soul.
4. Eleatic concept of soul.
5. Atomistic concept of soul.
6. Conclusion.

An overview of the main chapters:-

The introductory chapter discusses the two fold objectives of the study in detail, and present an over view of the main chapters, the scope of the study.

The second chapter is titled "**Milesian concept of soul**" Ionian or Milesian philosophers are those who dwelt in Ionia or Miletus. Milesian philosophers were often referred to as naturalist and who as materialist philosophers. But the term "materialist" is not applicable to the Milesian philosophers in the same sense in which later western philosophers have used the term. For Ionian philosophers did not difine the matter as an inert object like the modern materialist philosophers. The central purpose of the Milesian philosophers was to explain the diversity of the universe. They admitted a single entity such as water, air, fire etc. as a fundamental principle of the universe. But all Milesian were not monist, some of them were pluralist such as Empedocles, Anaxagoras etc. It is strange that they had also attempted to explain the soul in terms of that principle. To examine the Milesian concept of soul this chapter will be further divided into sections.

(a) Monistic concept of soul.

(b) Pluralistic concept of soul.

Political map of Greece

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(a) Monistic concept of soul: Thales the founder of Milesian philosophy, even Greek philosophy. He regarded the water as a fundamental principle of the universe. What then implies is, water is also the begetter of soul. Soul itself includes in everything. If we accept it, then, "everything is full of water or life" is legitimately true. It means there is no distinction between animate and inanimate beings. So, Thales was a hylozoist. But it is contradictory to our ordinary experience. For in our daily life we notice, an animate being has consciousness and it responses but an inanimate being cannot do so. Water is the cause of everything, then, every characteristics of it transfers into its begetting. For begetting is the transformation of begetter. Some commentators claim that Thales identified soul with force. "Thales too seems, from what is recorded about him, to have regarded the soul as a motive force, since he said that the loadstone has a soul because it makes the iron move"[3]. Some authors also said claim, Thales believed in world soul. "The doctrine of the world-soul is then attributed quite passively to Thales by Aetios, who give it in the stoic phraseology which he found in the immediate source, and identifies the world intellectual with God."[4] But no one clearly mentions whether Thales believed in the immortality and transmigration of soul or not.

Anaximenes of Miletus, anther Milesian philosopher regarded air as the fundamental principle of the universe and identified soul with it. He talked about breath-soul. According to him our breath soul holds us together like air; air encloses the whole universe in the same way our breath also holds us together. It is also immortal and divine. But he did talk about the transmigration of soul. Diogenes of Appolina also explained the concept of soul like Anaximenes.

Heraclitus of Ephesus regarded the fire as soul and it is also the fundamental principle of the universe. But some writers claim, according to him soul is the spark of the divine fire but it is not pure like divine fire. He believed fire is the subject of motion, the universal law, and it rules the whole universe. "…the primitive matter of the world, the deity or the law of the universe is not separated from the primitive fire."[5] He talked two types of soul, these are wet soul and dry soul, and dry soul is wisest and best. So, dry soul is higher than wet soul. Moist polluted our soul, wet soul has no control over the body. He always advised peoples to abstain from bodily pleasure as much as possible, because bodily pleasure lead to a moistening and it is a weakening of the soul. Now-a-days we treat fire as an inert, lifeless entity but Heraclitus thought on fire was quietly different. "For fire in his view is the living and eternally moved principle…."[6] Fiery soul is immortal, after death it leaves our body but not enter into another body, it unites itself with divine fire. So fire soul does not transmigrate from body to body. "…the soul leaves the body; it is not extinguished but returns whence it comes to the world fire."[7] But some commentators claim that Heraclitus had borrowed the conception of life and death from other sources. "…the symbolic expression with reference to life and death which he borrowed from the language of the mysteres".[8]

(b) Pluralistic concept of soul: Those Milesian philosophers were known as pluralist who tried to explain the universe in terms of more than a single fundamental principle, such as Empedocles, Anaxagoras etc.

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[3] Guthrie, W.K.C. , *A History of Greek Philosophy ,* Vol. l, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962, P. 65.
[4] Burnet, John, *Early Greek Philosophy, 4th Ed,* Adam & Charles Black, London, 1930, P.49.
[5] Zeller, Edward, Alleyne, S.F. (Tr), *Ahistory of Greek Philosophy,* Vol. ll, Longmans, Green and Co. , London, 1881, P.44
[6] Edward
[7] Zeller, Edward, Palmer, L.R.(Tr.), *Outlines of The Hoistory of Greek Philosophy,* Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, London, 1963, P. 47.
[8] Ibid, PP. 47- 48.

Empedocles' concept of soul was different from his predecessors. For, he did not identify soul with fundamental principles of the universe. "Empedocles never thought that the elements have soul."[9] So he did not admit hylozoism, although he believed, the soul also inherent in the plants. According to him soul is an exile daemon. The daemon exiles from the kingdom of divinity due to flesh eating or oath breaking. "…an ancient decree of the gods, eternal sealed fast with broad oaths that when one of the divine spirit whose portion is long life sinfully stain his own limbs with bloodshed , and following hate has sworn a flesh oath"[10]. It lives in the organic body and transmigrates through plants, animals and human body for a long time. "…these must wander for thrice ten thousand seasons for from the company of the blessed, being born throughout the period into all kinds of mortal shapes, which exchange one hand way of life for another."[11] The concept of transmigration is similar to the Orphic-Pythagorean. It returns again at the divine kingdom and reunion with god after the purification through the cycle of reincarnations. Some commentators claim that Empedocles defined soul as a moving force and he identified it with *love*. *Love* is regarded as the moving force which combines the elements together and generates new beings. But it is unacceptable, if soul is the only moving force, then, it must be the combination of *love* and *hate*. For, hate itself is also a force and ceases the combination of elements, and death is nothing more than this cessation. So, hate is responsible for that.

Anaxagoras of clazomenae is the first philosopher who represented the concept of mind but not soul. But he defined it as a moving force. So it can be said that he had only used the term mind instead of the term of soul to designate the moving force. He also did not identify it to the fundamental principle of the universe or exile daemon. According to him it is oppose to matter, rarest and purest of all things. So Anaxagoras is the first philosopher who made a clear cut distinction between mind-body. Even if he claimed that mind is oppose to matter but never had he mentioned that it is spiritual. It must, lastly posse's unlimited knowledge, for only through its knowledge is it in a portion to order all things for the best. He also did not clearly mention what he thought about immortality and transmigration of mind. Moreover, it is true that, mind is not material, but it does not necessarily imply that it must be spiritual. It may be that mind is something other than spiritual such as number. Due to the concept of binary opposites we assume if something is oppose to matter, then, it must be spiritual. He believed in innumerable mind and said that the smaller mass of sprit is of the same nature as the greater, things are the distinguished only according to the quantity, not by the quality of the sprit inherent by them. So mind is co-extensive to the body. It is true that Anaxagoras regarded the mind as a cause of motion somebody claims that mind itself is a motion or order. "Anaxagoras came to the conclusion it can be only understood as the working of an incorporeal force…."[12] Now question is if it is incorporeal, then, why some doxographers have claimed its quantitative difference.

The third chapter is titled "**Pythagorean concept of soul**". This chapter deals with the concept of Pythagoras and his followers. Pythagorean concept of psyche is abstract and too much mysterious. It was based on ethical believes. Such as silence, which is regarded as a golden virtue aiding the purification of soul, Temperance, art of control of temper, tongue and desires, Fasting for physical and mental purification, dietetics abstain from animal flesh, liquors etc. It is also more controversial than that of the other school. For, commentators interpret their views on soul in their own way and they

[9] Zeller, Edward, Palmer, L.R.(Tr.), *Outlines of The Hoistory of Greek Philosophy,* Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, London, 1963, P. 137.
[10] Freeman, Kahtleen, *Ancilla To The Pre-Socratic Philosophers,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1948, P. 62.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Zeller, Edward, Alleyne, S.F.(Tr.), *A History of Greek Philosophy* Vol.ll,Longmans,Green & Co. London, 1881,P.330.

were not agreed with each other. But it was quite opposite in the case of Pythagorean's predecessors such as Anaximenes' breath soul, Heraclitus' fiery soul etc. Aristotle claimed that soul is composition and harmony of contraries. "The soul…. Its supporters' say that the soul is a kind of harmony, for harmony is a blend or composition of contraries and the body are the compounded out of contraries."[13] But if we admit it, then, we face other problems. For, Pythagoreans in immortality and transmigration of soul and also believed in the kinship of animate beings. For this reason they advised us to abstain from animal flesh along with beans. "…the Pythagorean order on the doctrine of transmigration. All living and organic beings (including the plant worlds) were regarded as an interrelated, since they represented embodiment of the daemons."[14] But there is a controversy about the Pythagorean's theory of transmigration. Herodotus claimed, they had borrowed it from Egyptians. Another one says that they had adopted it from Orphic religion. "… he adopted the doctrine of transmigration which first made appears in Orphic society…."[15] But it is very hard to determine the source from whence Pythagoreans borrowed their theories of immortality and transmigration of soul. For Pythagoras had travelled a lot of places such as Egypt, India, and Babylon, Syria etc.

Another doxographer said, soul is a harmony of its own parts, not of the parts of the body just as music is a harmony of the numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4, and not of the frame and strings of the lyre. But it is opposed to immortality. For which are composed of parts, they may be perpetual, but not eternal. One day they must cease to exist. So it is not consistent to the concept of immortal soul. But those who have claimed it they also admitted that Pythagoreans believed in the immortality and transmigration of soul.

In this connection it is important to keep in mind that Pythagoreans did not present the same conception of soul such as Simmias, believed in mortal soul.

"Our body being, as it were strung and hold together by warm and cold, the dry and the moist and the things of that sorts, our soul is a part of temperament and attainment of these when they are mingled with one another well and in due to attainment, it is clear that, when the body has been relaxed or strung up out of measure disease and other ills, the soul must necessarily perish at once."[16]

Hippasus another Pythagorean who produced a mingled conception of soul as a Pythagorean he regarded soul as a number; on the other hand he also recognized its fiery nature. "Naturally he is coupled with Heraclitus as a teaching that the soul was of a fiery nature but being a Pythagorean he also thought of it as a number."[17]

Alcmaeon broke down Pythagorean concept of kinship of human beings and animals, and made a distinction among human beings and animals. "He therefore insisted of every turn on the Pythagorean belief in the close kinship of men and lower animals whereas Alcmaeon distinguish

[13] Guthrie, W.K.C*., A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. l, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962, P.307.
[14] Zeller, Edward, Palmer, L.R.(Tr*.) Outlines of The History of Greek Philosophy*, RoutLedge& Kegan Paul LTD, London,1963. P.34.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Burnet, John, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 4th Ed, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1930, PP. 295-96.
[17] Guthrie, W.K.C*., A History of Greek Philosophy* , Vol. l, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962,P.321.

between mind and sense and regarded the possession of intelligence as making of humanity from the beast."[18]

The fourth chapter is titled "**Eleatic concept of soul**". Xenophanes among the Eleatic philosophers was one who believed in soul. Even if it is ambiguous due to the absence of enough documents what he actually understand by soul. But it is true; he recognized the Orphic-Pythagorean conception of transmigration of soul. "And now I will turn to another tale and point the way ….Once they say that he (Pythagoras) was passing when a dog was being beaten and spoke this word: stop! Don't beat it! For it is the soul of a friend that I recognized when I heard its voice (Fr. 8)."[19]

It is known to us; most of all pre-Socratic philosophers define soul as a moving force or cause of motion. But Parmenides, Zeno, and Melissus did not talk about soul. It seems they denied motion because they also denied its begetter. But it is merely a guess. They might have denied it due to some other reasons. According to these philosophers all living creatures including human beings have originated from sea and earth. So it is not clear why they did not say much about the soul.

The fifth chapter is titled "**Atomistic concept of soul**". Lucippus is the founder of this school. But we do not have enough documents about his philosophy. We have just known from Aristotle and Theophratus, he was disciple of Parmenides and teacher of Democritus. Even if they have unable to serve sufficient information about him and his works, then it is also unknown to us what he thought about the soul.

Democritus of Abdera, student of Lucippus was a prominent atomist. His conception of soul was somewhat different from that of his precursors. For, he did not discuss about the purification, transmigration and immortality of soul. Another important feature, he recognized soul as a physical and corporeal subject but he made a distinction between soul and body. According to him soul is consist of the most movable substance- of fire, smooth and round atoms-in other words of fire. These fiery atoms are diffuse throughout the whole body; these fiery atoms are the essence, the noblest and the most divine part of human beings. It has numerous faculties and has their rest in different organs of our body and satisfies their jobs, such as thought in brain, anger in heart etc. When these fiery atoms leave any particular organ it does not satisfy its own job. In sleep we cannot think due to the absence of fiery atoms from our brain and in that fiery atoms return again in our brain after awakening from sleep. But in death all fiery atoms leave our body and never come back it again. According to Democritus atoms immutable, then, it is certain that the fiery atoms will never be cease with our body. If so then after death where do these fiery atoms return and how they enter in to a new body – it is not clear in Democritus' conception of soul. Some writers mention that Democritus had travelled various places like his predecessors, such as Egypt, Babylon etc. then, the same objection also raises against that, did he borrowed his theories from any other sources?

It can be said based on aforementioned discussion that the pre-Socratic concept of soul gradually developed in pre-Socratic era. If we look at the pre-Socratic concept of soul, we get find that the multiple dimensions such as clinical aspect, religious aspect etc. of the pre-Socratic concept of soul has been revealed. Some relevant factors namely Ethics, Religion etc. have played remarkable role to develop the pre-Socratic concept of soul.

[18] Ibid. P. 355.
[19] Burnet, John*, Early Greek Philosophy*, 4th Ed., Adam & Charles Black, London, 1930, P. 118.

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